

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 AID-05 EA-10 EUR-12 DODE-00 PA-01
ICA-11 SP-02 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /080 W
-----024609 070024Z /66-61

R 052118Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 215
INFO AMEMBASSY LIMA
AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 LA PAZ 2757

FOR: DEPARTMENT OF LABOR DAN LAZORCHICK

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ELAB, BL
SUBJ: STATE OF BOLIVIAN LABOR ELECTION PROCESS

REF: LA PAZ 1581

1. SUMMARY: EIGHTY TO NINETY PERCENT OF BOLIVIA'S TRADE UNIONS HAVE HELD THEIR LOCAL ELECTIONS. IN MOST SECTORS MODERATES DOMINATED THE ELECTION RESULTS BUT THE EXTREME LEFT, AS EXPECTED, WON CONTROL OF THE MINEWORKERS SECTION, THE LARGEST AND MOST INFLUENTIAL AND MILITANT LABOR GROUP AS WELL AS THE URBAN TEACHERS, ALSO A LARGE AND PRESTIGIOUS LABOR ORGANIZATION. SOMEWHAT SURPRISINGLY, THE POLITICAL PARTIES DEMONSTRATED LITTLE ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH IN THE UNIONS AND HAVE ONLY BEEN ABLE TO INFLUENCE THE RESULTS SLIGHTLY THROUGH FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS. SOMETIME IN MAY THE TEACHERS AND MINERS ARE EXPECTED TO PRESENT THEIR DEMANDS FOR VERY LARGE WAGE INCREASES TO THE GOB. WITH LEFTISTS IN CONTROL OF THESE TWO KEY UNIONS A CONFRONTATION IS POSSIBLE THAT COULD LEAD TO SERIOUS STRIKES. END SUMMARY.

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2. WITH MORE THAN TWO MONTHS HAVING LAPSED SINCE THE GOB ANNOUNCEMENT OF JANUARY 24, 1978 OF THE RESTORATION OF FULL TRADE UNION FREEDOMS, SOME 80-90 PERCENT OF THE LOCAL UNIONS AND SOME OF THE FEDERATIONS HAVE HELD THEIR ELECTIONS. BY THE END OF APRIL OR EARLY MAY IT IS EXPECTED THAT THE ELECTION PROCESS THROUGH THE CONFEDERATION LEVEL WILL HAVE BEEN COMPLETED.

3. IN MOST SECTORS, INCLUDING THE RURAL TEACHERS, BANK-WORKERS, RAILROAD WORKERS, TRANSPORT WORKERS, ETC., PERSONS CONSIDERED MODERATE OR CENTER-LEFT, MOSTLY MNR AND TO A MUCH LESSER EXTENT FSB AFFILIATES, HAVE DOMINATED THE ELECTION RESULTS. HOWEVER, AS EXPECTED, IN THE MINEWORKER AND URBAN TEACHER SECTORS THE EXTREME LEFT (COMMUNISTS AND OTHER MARXISTS) HAS REWON CONTROL. THE LEFT ALSO HAS SOME SUCCESSES AMONG THE FACTORY WORKERS, ALBEIT LESS THAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN EXPECTED.

4. THE MAJOR SURPRISE OF THE ELECTION PROCESS THUS FAR IS THAT WHILE AFFILIATES OF THE VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES, FROM THE FSB ON THE RIGHT TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PEKING) ON THE LEFT, HAVE BEEN ELECTED, THIS APPARENTLY HAS NOT BEEN DUE TO THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH OF THEIR PARTIES. WHAT ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH THESE PARTIES HAD WAS APPARENTLY DISSIPATED DURING THE THREE YEARS IN WHICH POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY WAS SUSPENDED. THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE CLAIMED SIGNIFICANT VICTORIES IN GETTING THEIR LOYALISTS ELECTED, BUT DISCUSSIONS WITH THE ELECTED LEADERS AND OTHER INVOLVED IN THE ELECTION PROCESS CLEARLY INDICATED THAT WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE URBAN TEACHERS, THE MINEWORKERS, AND TO SOME EXTENT THE FACTORY AND RAILROAD WORKERS, THE POLITICAL PARTIES HAVE EITHER NOT EVEN TRIED TO INFLUENCE THE ELECTIONS (MOST CASES) OR HAVE FAILED IN THEIR EFFORTS TO DO SO.
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5. EVEN WHERE THE PARTIES HAVE MADE AN IMPACT IT HAS NOT BEEN BECAUSE OF THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL STRENGTH BUT THROUGH FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE CANDIDATES. THE CENTRO OBERO BOLIVIANO (COB), DOMINATED BY PRIN LEADER JUAN LECHIN, CHANNLED MONEY TO THE LEFTISTS WHO WON MOST OF THE URBAN TEACHERS' ELECTIONS. (ON THE OTHER SIDE THE GOB HELPED THE MODERATES.) HOWEVER, NEITHER THE MNR NOR THE FSB HAVE HAD THE RESOURCES TO HELP THEIR AFFILIATES. THE POR AND THE TWO COMMUNIST PARTIES (MOSCOW AND PEKING) HAVE CHANNLED MONEY TO THEIR SUPPORTERS AMONG THE MINEWORKERS. IT IS NOT BELIEVED, HOWEVER, THAT THIS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, GENERALLY USED FOR TRADITIONAL CAMPAIGN EXPENSES LIKE POSTERS AND LEAFLETS, PLAYED MORE THAN A MINOR ROLE IN THE ELECTION RESULTS. INSTEAD, THE WORKERS IGNORED POLITICAL PARTY AFFILIATION (WHERE THEY WERE AWARE OF IT) AND ELECTED LEADERS FOR THE MOST TRADITIONAL REASON--THEY WERE BELIEVED TO BE MOST CAPABLE OF OBTAINING WAGE INCREASES AND BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS.

6. IN THE MINING SECTOR ALL BUT ONE (SIGLO XX) OF THE 31 UNIONS IN COMIBOL HAVE HELD THEIR ELECTIONS. ACCORDING TO

THE DIRECTOR OF INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS OF COMIBOL, PERSONS AFFILIATED WITH THE EXTREME LEFT, I.E., THE TWO COMMUNIST PARTIES, THE POR, AND THE PRIN, HAVE WON CONTROL IN 18 OF THE 31 UNIONS, INCLUDING THE LARGE UNIONS OF CATAVI (BOLIVIA'S LARGEST MINE) AND MATILDE. SIGLO XX IS ALSO EXPECTED SHORTLY TO ELECT A LEFTIST SLATE. HUANUNI ELECTED A SLATE OF OFFICERS OF MIXED POLITICAL PERSUASSIONS AND THE POLITICAL LEANINGS OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ARE UNCLEAR. THE EXECUTIVE BOARD OF HUANUNI EXCEPT FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL IS DUE TO BEGIN A ONE-WEEK COURSE AT AIFLD IN EARLY APRIL. THIS WILL BE THE FIRST AIFLD COURSE FOR MINEWORKERS SINCE TRADE UNION FREEDOMS WERE SUSPENDED IN 1974. IN THE 12 UNIONS IN THE QUECHISLA COMPLEX IN THE SOUTHERN PART OF BOLIVIA, WHICH IS DOMINATED BY MODERATE MINEWORKER LEADER VICTOR LOPEZ (WHO IS CONFIDENTIAL

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EXPECTED TO BE REELECTED TO HIS POST AS SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE MINE WORKERS' FEDERATION), MOSTLY MODERATES AND SOME LEFTISTS WERE ELECTED.

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ICA-11 SP-02 TRSE-00 OMB-01 /080 W
-----025112 070025Z /66

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 LA PAZ 2757

FOR: DEPARTMENT OF LABOR DAN LAZORCHICK

7. IN THE TEACHING SECTOR THERE WAS A CLEAR DIVISION AMONG THE RURAL AND URBAN TEACHERS. THE RURAL TEACHERS, LESS EDUCATED AND LESS POLITICIZED THAN THEIR URBAN COHORTS,

ELECTED MODERATES, BUT IN THE URBAN TEACHER SECTION LEFTISTS WON CONTROL OF 10 OF THE 18 FEDERATIONS INCLUDING THE FEDERATIONS OF LA PAZ, COCHABAMBA AND ORURO. MODERATES WON IN SANTA CRUZ AND TARIJA AND WON PARTIAL CONTROL IN SUCRE.

8. THE RAILROAD UNIONS PRESENT A SPECIAL CASE BECAUSE OF THE DOMINATION OF LONG-TIME LABOR LEADER AND DIRECTOR OF LABOR AFFAIRS FOR THE MNR, JUAN SANJINES OBANDO, THE CLOSEST THING TO A POLITICAL BOSS THAT EXISTS IN BOLIVIA. BECAUSE OF SANJINES' LONG AFFILIATION WITH THE MNR AND THE FACT THAT HIS SUPPORTERS ARE ALL MNR LOYALISTS, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO SAY PARTY AFFILIATION DID NOT PLAY SOME ROLE IN THE ELECTION IN MOST UNIONS OF SANJINES' SUPPORTERS, BUT CLEARLY IT WAS THE IDENTIFICATION WITH SANJINES, RATHER THAN THE MNR, THAT WAS THE DOMINATING FACTOR.

9. IN THE FACTOR WORKERS SECTOR IT APPEARS THAT MODERATES (CENTER LEFT) WON CONTROL OF MOST UNIONS, BUT LEFTISTS HAVE

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MADE SOME INROADS. (DETAILS ARE STILL SKETCHY IN THIS SECTOR.)

10. OVERALL THE RESULTS ARE ABOUT AS COULD BE EXPECTED. MODERATES WON CONTROL, AS EXPECTED, OF MOST SECTORS, INCLUDING ALMOST ALL OF THE SMALLER UNIONS. UNDER-SECRETARY OF LABOR, DR FLAVIO DURAN AGREES AND THINKS THE GOB CAN WORK WITH MOST OF THESE NEW LEADERS.

11. HOWEVER, THE EXTREME LEFT HAS CLEARLY DOMINATED THE ELECTION RESULTS THUS FAR IN TWO OF BOLIVIA'S MOST IMPORTANT UNION SECTORS, THE MINEWORKERS AND THE URBAN TEACHERS. THIS HAD BEEN EXPECTED AND WAS SIMPLY A CONTINUATION OF PAST TRENDS IN THESE SECTORS. BOTH OF THESE UNION GROUPS ARE EXPECTED TO HOLD THEIR NATIONAL FEDERATION OR CONFEDERATION (FUNCTIONALLY THE SAME) CONGRESS IN LATE APRIL AND LEFTISTS WILL UNDOUBTEDLY BE ELECTED TO ALL OR MOST OF THE IMPORTANT POSITIONS.

12. BOTH GROUPS WILL THEN PROBABLY PRESENT IN MAY THEIR DEMANDS FOR THEIR FIRST LEGAL WAGE INCREASES SINCE 1974. (THEY HAVE RECEIVED BONUSES IN LIEU OF WAGE INCREASES SINCE 1974.) THE TEACHERS ARE WIDELY CONSIDERED (EVEN BY THE UNDER-SECRETARY OF EDUCATION) TO BE THE POOREST PAID PROFESSIONAL GROUP IN BOLIVIA AND EVEN THE MODERATE TEACHERS HAVE BEEN DEMANDING AT LEAST A 50 PERCENT (FROM \$B2,000 TO \$B3,000 PER MONTH) WAGE INCREASE. IF, AS SEEMS CERTAIN, THE EXTREME LEFT WINS CONTROL OF THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF TEACHERS, THE WAGE PETITION ALREADY PRESENTED TO THE GOB BY THE TEACHERS WILL PROBABLY BE REVISED TO INCLUDE DEMANDS FOR EVEN LARGER WAGE INCREASES.

13. THE MINERS ARE ALSO IN A VERY MILITANT MOOD. THEY CLAIM

THAT SOME MINERS RECEIVE AS LITTLE AS \$B20 PER DAY. IN
1976 THEY DEMANDED A MINIMUM WAGE OF \$B80 PER DAY, A DEMAND THAT
CONTRIBUTED TO THE GOB DECLARING ILLEGAL THE MINERS' FEDERATION
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AND EXILING MOST OF ITS LEADERS. NOW THEY ARE EXPECTED TO DEMAND
EVEN MORE.

14. CONSEQUENTLY, THE DANGERS OF A CONFRONTATION BETWEEN
THESE TWO GROUPS AND THE GOB IS CLEAR. WHILE THE GOB APPEARS
TO BE PREPARED TO GRANT SOME TYPE OF WAGE INCREASE TO THE
TEACHERS AND TO THE MINERS, IT IS HIGHLY UNLIKELY THAT THE
GOB IS WILLING OR ABLE FINANCIALLY TO ACCEPT THE LARGE
DEMANDS THAT WILL PROBABLY BE PRESENTED TO THEM BY THESE TWO
UNIONS (WITH MANY OTHERS WAITING TO SEE HOW LARGE A WAGE
INCREASE THESE TWO SECTORS ARE ABLE TO WIN). ANOTHER DANGER,
IMPOSSIBLE TO ASSESS AT THIS TIME, IS THAT THE LEFTIST UNIONS
WILL DELIBERATELY TRY TO DEADLOCK THE NEGOTIATIONS TO FORCE
STRIKES, POSSIBLY INCLUDING A GENERAL STRIKE, WITH THE INTENTION
OF WEAKENING THE GOB AND POSSIBLY DERAILING THE ELECTION PROCESS.

15. A KEY FIGURE IN DETERMING HOW THESE WAGE NEGOTIATIONS
WILL TURN OUT IS JUAN LECHIN OQUENDO, LONG-TIME EXECUTEVE
SECRETARY OF THE MINERS' FEDERATION AND THE COB WHO IS
EXPECTED TO BE RE-ELECTED TO BOTH POSTS. (THE DATE FOR THE
COB ELECTION IN UNKNWON.) LECHIN HAS BEEN MAINTAINING A LOW
PROFILE SINCE HIS RETURN TO BOLIVIA FROM VENEZLUELA IN FEBRUARY
(RECENTLY HE WENT BACK TO VENEZUELA WITH NO ANNOUNCED RETURN
DATE), AND WHAT POSITION HE WILL TAKE IS NOT KNOWN.
IN HIS ONLY PUBLIC STATEMENT LECHIN SAID HE WANTS
TO AVOID A CONFRONTATION. UNFORTUNATELY, IT IS NOT CLEAR
THAT LECHIN, EVEN IF HE WANTS TO, CAN CONTROL HIS
MORE RADICAL COLLEAGUES FROM THE COMMUNIST PARTY (PEKING)
AND THE POR.

16. AS A FINAL NOTE IT SHOULD BE ADDED THAT THE GOVERNMENT-
NAMED LABOR COORDINATORS HAVE, AS EXPECTED, FARED POORLY
IN THE ELECTIONS OUTSIDE THE BANKING SECTOR (SEE PARA 6
OF REFTEL). MOST COORDINATORS HAVE NOT EVEN TRIED TO WIN
ELECTION, AND WHEN THEY TRIED, MOST FAILED.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION RESULTS, LABOR UNIONS, ELECTIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 05 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LAPAZ02757
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780149-0865
Format: TEL
From: LA PAZ
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780491/aaaacyyj.tel
Line Count: 275
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 2313eeb5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: ONLY
Reference: 78 LA PAZ 1581
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3070689
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STATE OF BOLIVIAN LABOR ELECTION PROCESS
TAGS: ELAB, BL
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/2313eeb5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014